However, the source of conflict in the relationship between Corinne and Oswald, and consequently the source of her melancholy, can also be traced back to the repressive patriarchal ideologies dealt with in the novel. Oswald’s inability to fully accept a relationship with Corinne is not only influenced by the paternal authority referenced earlier, but also by the cultural gender norms to which he has become accustomed. This discrepancy is perhaps best exemplified in de Stael’s juxtaposition of Corinne and Lucile, and Oswald’s reaction to the latter:

Thus everything conspired against the absent Corinne, who had no means, save letters, for reviving, from time to time, the tenderness of Oswald. She had to contend with his love of country, his filial remorse, the exhortations of his friends, in favour of resolutions so easy to adopt, as they led him towards a budding beauty, whose every charm seemed to harmonise with the calm, chaste hopes of a domestic lot, (de Stael, 307).

This above passage illustrates the ways in Corinne is posed in opposition to Lucile, who embodies traditional and domestic matrimonial norms. In addition, the fact that Oswald’s gravitation toward Lucile is also influenced by the thoughts of family and friends illustrates the ways in which this privileging of normative gender roles is widespread and socially accepted. Viewed in the context of Schaper’s idea of gendered spheres, it becomes clear that Oswald’s ultimate choice of Lucile for a wife is symptomatic of the ways in which the patriarchal ideologies limiting women to domesticity are oppressive. The fact that the realm of the professional is considered masculine further illustrates the ways in which Corinne’s melancholic suffering is the result of gender bias. As a woman with a career as an improvisatrice, Corinne is stepping outside the domestic sphere. Ultimately, she is unable to survive the ways in which she is oppressed.

While the above lines of reasoning provide ways in which Corinne’s melancholy can be read as symptomatic of patriarchal repression, it’s also necessary to explore how such melancholy functions as a rebellion against these oppressive ideologies. An analysis of female melancholy by Jacques Khalip offers a useful frame for analysis: “For Wollstonecraft,

as for Shelley, the female melancholic is perceived as ambivalently participating in and challenging what she will call "making an appearance in the world" the project of developing the social terms under which one makes oneself known and available to others,” (Khalip, 86). Accepting the Wollstonecraft/Shelley view of melancholy allows Corinne’s death to be read as a rebellion against the oppressive systems that produced it in the first place. In her death, Corinne is removing herself from the world and rejecting the social terms that are available to her presentation of self. In this way, Corinne’s death is an act of agency.

Using these two novels to illustrate the ways in which melancholy can be read as both symptom of and reactive to patriarchal ideologies illuminates the diverse ways in which such ideologies are impactful. Although we tend to think of patriarchal oppression as being primarily directed toward women, analyses of Victor and Oswald as characters illustrate the ways in which they, too, are restricted by these systems. On the other hand, an examination of Corinne’s descent into melancholy reveals the ways in which these ideologies function oppressively in different ways, with relation to gender.

While the two novels discussed are distinct and unique in their own rights, they are linked by the temporal and cultural climate from which they were produced. In addition, both works were produced by female writers, suggesting that the patriarchal ideologies were not irrelevant to the authors themselves. Although this paper examines only two works of a prolific literary tradition, these works offer a strong foundation for redefining ideas of melancholy. So frequently, suffering and destruction are posed as acts of defeat. However, in the works of Shelley and de Stael, these manifestations of the melancholy can serve as means for shedding light upon injustice and inequality.